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ABSTRACT

Selection of the chief administrative officer for a college or university ranks extremely high among important decisions required by the membership on the board. In discussing the role of the trustees in the evaluation of college and university leadership, the following suggestions are made: (1) Clearly indicate the expectations of leadership and the conditions of appointment. (2) Explain whether and how presidential leadership will be undertaken. (3) Discuss the expectations of leadership, including relations with the board, as well as problems unique to the mission of the institution and its location. (4) Are there means for the in-service education of leadership renewal possible through leaves, grants, or other considerations? Are there ways by which a "successful" or "unsuccessful" president may exit with dignity? In the establishment of a formal evaluation program, the following are suggested as the minimal requirements: (1) a basic statement of the expectations of residential leadership; (2) a provision for a written self-evaluation of leadership strengths and weaknesses; (3) a clearly defined statement of evaluation procedures; (4) a meeting between the resident and the governing board (or its representative) to discuss the evaluation while in progress. (Author/KE)

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ON
THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 1975
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AN ADDRESS BY:

ROBERT W. MacVITTIE
PRESIDENT
STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, GENESEO

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
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Trustees and the Evaluation of the Chief Executive Officer

I assure you that I have not been invited to make some introductory comments on the basis of my extensive knowledge of the subject of the evaluation of chief executive officers of colleges and universities. I have, however, for some time retained a high degree of interest in the evaluation of administrative leadership, particularly that of the college and university president, or the chief executive officer. I must make an assumption that those in this room who are Trustees are generally aware of their responsibilities. In the United States, the historical role of the Trustee generally has included the holding of the charter of the institution, establishing the overall policy, the selection of the chief executive officer, supervision of the raising of funds, approval of the budget, and representation of the institution with its many publics. Indeed, Trustees recognize that the selection of the chief administrative officer for a college or university ranks extremely high among those important decisions required by membership on the Board.

Dr. Ordway Tead[1] has indicated that:

> "Trustees are, of course, in the last analysis, holding the operation of education in trust as a public service. Every college has now become, in fact, a public agency; and it is required to gain and hold public confidence. To do this means a two-way relationship and trust. The wider public has to realize that for it to perform its unique mission the college must have its own special degree of freedom, of elbow room, of leisure, and the absence of influence from outside pressures."

[1] Tead, Ordway, Trustees, Teachers, Students--Their Role in Higher Education. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 1955, pp. 23-24.

The general theme for this Eleventh Annual Trustee Conference -- The Impact of the Economy Upon Higher Education -- provides an overall setting within which the Trustees can re-examine the roles which they must play. The governing board, by whatever title, is responsible for the growth and development and successful operation of the institution. Present forecasting of the shrinking enrollments, financial strictures, and a re-examination of the purpose and values of higher education in general create a situation where the total leadership provided to a college or university must be called to account.

It is, of course, necessary for Trustees to look for leadership to the Chairman of the Board. The Board must, in turn, depend upon the chief executive officer whom they select to preside over the institution and to lead it toward the fulfillment of its objectives. There are a good many who believe that American higher education strongly supports a contention that no college or university has made important progress except under the leadership of an outstanding chief executive officer. There are some who would argue that there is a close and positive relationship between the quality of the institution and the success of the leadership.

Many colleges and universities are experiencing increased difficulty in attracting and holding able persons to serve as chief administrative officers. The individuals who remain in such positions stand virtually unanimous in the opinion that their role has become more difficult and more demanding. Trustees depend upon effective leadership provided by the chief administrative officer. Indeed, the Board takes seriously its responsibilities for the development of effective policy. If the executive officer is key to Board policy implementation and institutional operation, it must

give some attention to the need to evaluate the effectiveness of the leadership provided by the chief executive officer. Good policy can be administered badly, with serious consequences.

There has been growing evidence of interest throughout the United States in the more formal evaluation of college and university presidential leadership. Whether the impetus for this interest came from Kingman Brewster's provocative and voluntary efforts to have his leadership evaluated, or whether it grew out of the interest of Chancellor Ernest L. Boyer, of the State University of New York, or Chancellor Theodore Mitau, of the Minnesota State Colleges, or others, remains to be seen. There is growing evidence of broader acceptance of the need to evaluate presidential leadership, even though the procedures to be used are in a developmental state. The topic is more noticeable now in the literature for higher education than it has been in the past ten years.

There is, at the present time, a national study under way under the direction of Dr. Barry Munitz, Vice President for Academic Development and Coordination of the University of Illinois, who is serving as project director for a Presidential Study Group. This particular group is looking more carefully and more thoroughly at the evaluation of administrative leadership. The study is being financed by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, and hopefully, will report out later this year on its findings and its suggestions for helping us to become better informed and more effective in evaluating the administrative leadership of colleges and universities.

Gerald P. Burns, in his book, Trustees in Higher Education, states that:[1]

> "The internal relationships between trustees and their chairman, president, administrators, faculty and students...is quite

[1] Burns, G.P., Trustees in Higher Education. New York, Independent College Funds of America, Inc., 1966, p. 35.

> important. ...As the key man in operational matters, the college president occupies a position as executive officer under the chairman. Trustees act with him officially as a group on policy matters and unofficially as individuals for purposes of advice and assistance."

Perhaps I can clarify matters by suggesting that Trustees are legislative bodies, with the college and university president seen as the executive.

Chief executive officers of institutions of higher education bear an enormous responsibility for leadership. The campus turmoil of the Sixties, faculty militancy, shrinking enrollments, lower levels of financial support, evidence of public disenchantment, and many other phenomena still challenge college and university leadership. This conference, particularly, indicates the recurring strain of fiscal pressures. The pressure of leadership in critical times inevitably takes its toll on individuals and on institutions. It can be argued that leadership styles vary and some are more appropriate to provide leadership in the excitement of growing and emerging institutions and programs. It may also be argued that it takes an entirely different kind of leadership to provide good stewardship in periods of shrinking enrollments and fiscal constraints. A myth exists that suggests that successful presidential leadership at one university can be transplanted to another university. The missions, location, and social context argue against this myth. I believe in established criteria for evaluation of leadership. Some disagree.

Cohen and March, in their recent book, Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President, have this to say about evaluation:[1]

> "...we need to reconsider evaluation. As nearly as we can determine, there is nothing in a formal theory of evaluation that requires that criteria be specified in advance. In particular, the evaluation of social experiments need not be

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[1] Cohen, M.D., and J. G. March. Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President. Central Report prepared for The Carnegie Commission. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974, pp. 228.

> in terms of the degree to which they fulfilled our prior expectations. Rather, we can examine what they did in terms of what we now believe to be important. The prior specification of criteria and prior specification of evaluation procedures that depend upon such criteria are common presumptions in contemporary social policy making."

Cohen and March also suggest that "the administrator discovers that a wide assortment of factors outside his control are capable of overwhelming the impact on the actions he may take."[1]

The criteria of success in academic administration, as seen by Cohen and March, are sometimes moderately clear, but the relatively precise measures of college health tend neither to be stable over time nor to be critically sensitive to presidential action. Cohen and March suggest that:[2]

> "During the post-World War II years in American colleges, it was conventional to value growth and to attribute growth to the creative activities of administrative leaders. They point out that rapid expansion of higher education, which related to complex attitudes of students and faculty, massive extension of governmental subsidies, were not the simple consequences of decisions of college or university presidents. Nor, retrospectively, does it seem plausible to attribute major control over these events to college administrators."

Too frequently control is, however, expected. Leadership expectations are not unreasonable! If not evaluated, how can you ascribe success or failure.

The main function of the president is to preside over the institution and to lead it toward the fulfillment of its objectives. This may sound like a simple task, but those of you in this room know that it is completely complex. Gerald P. Burns, in Trustees in Higher Education,[3] points out that the president is concerned with many publics. He says:

> "The essential operations of the President are concerned with people. He works for the board, through his administrators, with the faculty, to educate the students. Those four groups constitute his inter-acting publics. There are other identifiable

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1 Cohen, M.D., and J. G. March. Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President. Central Report prepared for The Carnegie Commission. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974. pp. 228.

2 Op. Cit., pp. 21.

3 Burns, G. P., Trustees in Higher Education, pp. 51.

> individuals and groups with which he must deal to a lesser extent, (i.e., alumni, parents, donors, legislators, accrediting bodies, supervisory bodies, professional associations and unions, and friends of the institution)."

He also deals with other institutional administrators who aid him in his job, further success or compound failure. This kind of relationship and the variety of publics served makes the job of evaluation of leadership even more important. Perhaps it even proposes that there can be a degree of unevenness of success. A chief executive officer of a college or university may be successful as seen by his board, but the degrees of success may be much lower, as seen by another constituent group. This is why it is so very important that whatever plans are developed, if any formal evaluation plans are developed, the Trustees make provision for consulting in some fashion with the various constituencies vital in and to the institution.

It is important to realize that effective chief executive officers of colleges and universities work within the context of the missions and locale of the particular college or university. This is to say that, while there are similarities of mission and purpose in the organization of colleges and universities:[1]

> "The character of this college or university sets limits upon what policies can be meaningfully implemented and also identifies opportunities for imaginative leadership. The academic administrator works within a distinctive institutional setting; he must understand it well to be effective."

Lack of understanding of these parameters can lead to the need for trustees to select another president. This is no task for the uninitiated. John J. Corson, in his book, Governance of Colleges and Universities, suggests that:[2]

> "It is, however, a responsibility that never confronts many trustees, and those who are called upon to perform it do so

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[1] Corson, J. J., Governance of Colleges and Universities. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960, p. 182.

[2] Op. Cit., pg. 56.

> with little experience. Yet, in this task, they discharge a responsibility that influences every aspect of the functioning of the institution for a period of years."

It can be argued and, I believe persuasively, that the importance of chief executive officer leadership to the success of a higher education institution is such that it requires more than the typical informal assessment of effectiveness. This, of course, presents an area of controversy about which many presidents have mixed feelings. Many acknowledge the need for assessing or evaluating the role of the chief administrative officer. Some believe that the "Annual Report to Trustees" serves this function! The formal evaluation of the performance of the chief institutional officer, or the president, is a recent phenomenon which emerged from a growing general interest in the accountability of leadership of institutions of higher education. Th evaluation of presidential leadership can become even more important and necessary in those institutions or state-wide systems where presidents (or chancellors) are given term appointments, such as in Minnesota or New York. Leadership evaluation policies and procedures are separate from presidential appointment efforts even though a relationship can be implied by considering whether the appointee does the job, successfully.

Some may argue that college and university presidents are judged every day, and that the evaluation of presidential leadership is nothing new. The point is well taken, and there is even some agreement. However, the social context in which this leadership takes place, the requirements of responsible stewardship, and the increased interest in specified term appointments for presidents suggest the need for a more formal plan. There is a great deal of momentum, I believe, being generated by faculties throughout the country as they see a more careful evaluation required of them prior to making decisions for their own retention. It follows, some argue, that if administrative

officers are responsible for the evaluation of faculty performance, and are authorized to make the final decision on appointment status, regardless of how advice is obtained, then the very critical role of the administrative officer (particularly that of the president) must also stand the test of assessment.

There are, of course, I believe, other substantial reasons for this need for a formal evaluation. It gives a president an opportunity to present in a comprehensive fashion his own self-evaluation of the leadership that he feels he has performed. In this way, it provides an opportunity for examining the extent to which an institution may be judged to have grown well or grown less than well. It provides an opportunity for a commendation of leadership, encouragement, and greater understanding and advice. It probably will not be <u>all</u> favorable! It is seen by many presidents as a hazardous undertaking and provides an opportunity, if not handled judiciously, for opening up a Pandora's box. The nature of presidential leadership provides extensive opportunities for less than acceptant response by the many constituencies affected. As a consequence of this, the evaluation program must be more than a totalling of points and arriving at a given score.

Dr. Sheldon J. Plager, Professor of Law and Chairman, Study Group on Administrator Evaluation, University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois, in a report developed by a team at that campus, says:[1]

> "Here it is important note that <u>evaluation</u> is different from <u>examination</u>. No score should be calculated; there should be no grade of 'pass' or 'fail', nor should each criterion carry equivalent or constant weight. While a rating scale may be useful as a checklist, it must be remembered that what is

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[1] <u>Report of Study Group on Administrator Evaluation</u>, 1974. pp. 24-25.

involved is a sensitive technique for eliciting information and providing a context for interaction about performance as a basis (not a substitute) for judgment."

I believe that Trustees have the primary responsibility to select and appoint the person who serves as chief executive officer of a college or university. Professor Joseph Kaufman's publication for the Association of American Colleges presents an excellent monograph[1] on the state of this art. Of course, Trustees cannot stop there, but must see the ensuing years after presidential appointment as a major responsibility for continuous stewardship. Whether a formal procedure for the evaluation of leadership performance is developed depends upon the Trustees. Regardless, I believe there are important matters for which you, as Trustees, must be held accountable during the selection process and prior to appointment:

1. Clearly indicate the expectations of leadership and the conditions of appointment. Are there candid discussions of the behaviors expected of the president in his leadership role, and as a person? Are the president's constitutional rights while president clearly understood? Will the appointment be for a stated term or "at the pleasure of..."?
2. Explain whether and how presidential leadership will be undertaken. Will the process be a formal one? Will there be provision for consultation with the many constituents of the college or university?
3. Discuss the expectations of leadership, including relations with the Board, as well as any problems

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[1] Kaufman, Joseph F. The Selection of College and University Presidents. Washington, D. C., Association of American Colleges, 1974, pp. 3-82.

unique to the missions of the institution and its location. Are the ethical considerations of leadership understood?

4. Are there means for the in-service education or leadership renewal possible through leaves, grants, or other considerations? Are there ways through which a "successful" or "unsuccessful" president may exit with dignity?

You can deal with the needed discussions. The problem is to do so. A Board and its chief executive start fairly even at the time of appointment with expectations high. It is a time that is optimum to discuss even unpleasant matters!

Let me, in conclusion, suggest that the Trustee roles in selection and evaluation are related processes. However, a presidential review process differs from the search and appointment efforts. A presidential search is generally extensive, the process of screening and interviewing complex and lengthy. The evaluation process will generally not be as lengthy, but will focus on the performance of a president already known by his or her constituents. I believe it to be of the utmost importance that the Trustees retain major control of the evaluation process from the point of instigation, through the conduct of the review, and the conclusion of the process. Consultation to obtain constituent viewpoints is essential and appropriate, but the procedures for consultation shall be determined by the governing board. It is urgent that all parties to the evaluation process observe the proprieties appropriate to a dignified and professional evaluation procedure with great emphasis placed upon preserving confidentiality throughout the process.

Trustees need to examine their position in the matter of presidential evaluation carefully. It should result in a decision which is taken and seen as appropriate to the particular campus. Campus relationships with other boards (state-wide systems, coordinating boards), may add a degree of complexity to the discussion. The question of to whom is the president responsible may provide a clue to the involvement of other "super boards." What is the purpose of the evaluation? By whom shall it be conducted? What are the expectations and how shall the results be reported?

If you decide to move forward and answer affirmatively that there is a need for a formal evaluation program, I suggest as <u>minimal</u> the following:

1. A basic statement of the expectations of presidential leadership, based upon delineated criteria, which reflects the governing board's and other constituent groups' expectations for the presidential performance in the context of the institutional mission;
2. A provision for a written self-evaluation of leadership strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures (by the president, and in a form chosen by the president);
3. A clearly defined statement of evaluation procedures (involving the governing board and other constituent groups, including faculty, students, administrators, alumni, staff; and, if part of a state-wide system, central office personnel.
4. A meeting between the president and the governing board (or its representative) to discuss the evaluation while

in progress, or to respond to the results of the evaluation upon completion -- and before the general results of the evaluative process are acted upon or made known.

You, as Trustees, have a serious responsibility for the effectiveness of a college or university and the establishment and preservation of its viability and integrity. Your college or university president is key to the success of your endeavors. You may choose to provide for a formal evaluation of presidential leadership, or you may choose not to do so. Please -- examine the issues involved. Your action should be a matter of conviction, not inaction because you've never addressed the problem.